

## Teaching Composition in Schools: Challenges of EFL Teachers in Post-Soviet Georgia

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### Abstract

Writing in foreign language classes has long been a challenge for both teachers and students. With the rise of globalization, there is an urgent need for EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers to help students develop writing skills needed to function effectively in a society. This article reports on the practices and experiences of teachers of English in Georgian schools. It discusses how writing instruction is enacted in schools; how teachers perceive their pre-service education and professional opportunities regarding writing. The results of a qualitative analysis of teacher interviews indicate that (a) inadequate preparation at a pre-service level is a major concern for teachers; (b) absence of a unified curriculum on composition studies in schools prevents teachers from the implementation of the writing assignments in the classrooms; (c) teachers are seeking their own learning and professional growth pathways despite the lack of systematic professional development opportunities. Based on the findings, pedagogical implications are discussed with the aim of enhancing the teaching and learning of written English in foreign language in Georgia and ultimately, in other foreign language contexts.

**Key words:** EFL teachers, composition instruction, professional development.

### Introduction

A plethora of research has investigated English writing in the English as a Second Language (ESL) context where English plays a dominant role, whereas writing instruction in non-English contexts has not received enough attention (Lee, 2010; Leki, 2000; Leki et al., 2008; Cumming, 2009). Researchers have pointed out that teachers who work as English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers face specific obstacles in their professions (Leki, 2001). These obstacles are often caused by various contextual variables (Dimova, 2003; Gonzalez, 2004; Kamwangamalu, 2002; Reichelt, 2005; Taavitsainen & Pahta, 2003). To raise the standards of teaching and learning it is important to understand the factors that impact writing pedagogy in EFL contexts. Furthermore, the urgency of understanding EFL teachers' teaching practices comes from the role English language plays today in the world. In many countries, the urgency is amplified by such reasons as testing, publication requirements, international student mobility and global job market.

To fill the gap in the research literature, the researchers investigated how composition instruction has been enacted in schools in the former Soviet Republic of Georgia. In addition, the study explored how teachers perceived their pre-and in-service education and

professional development as pertained to teaching writing.

### EFL Teacher Education

In Georgia, there are a number of higher educational institutions, both private and state-owned that educate teachers to teach English. They offer both Bachelor's and Master's level programs and award diplomas in EFL Teaching, Translation, and Philology. Degrees granted in English exceed degrees granted in all other foreign languages. The spread and dominance of English are results from several reasons. First, after the split from the Soviet Union in 1993, the Georgian government set forth the integration of the country into a world community as its top priority. Second, the goal of the reforms initiated by the government was to broaden career trajectories of the graduates and improve their occupational flexibility and job mobility. Third, the demand for the knowledge of English is further amplified by the strong desire of the Georgian people to fight "the constructs associated with the former Soviet Union (Polat, 2009, p. 243). Achieving these goals was impossible without the mastery of the English language. Since the mastery of English is linked with the country's political power and economic resources, it is no surprise that teaching and learning English language is of

**Beyond Words Vol.6 No.1 (2018)**

paramount importance in educational settings. Under such circumstances, Georgian teachers of English language are expected to demonstrate professional growth and professionalism. To raise teaching standards and support teachers in improving their qualification, the Georgian government launched a teacher professional development program in 2001 with the reform initiated by the World Bank (Chakhaia, Kutateladze, & Amoroso, 2017). The goal of the reforms was multifaceted: first, reforms aimed at increasing the number of professional development training sessions for teachers. Second, reforms had to bring a major shift in teaching by refocusing attention from the teacher to the student. The reforms were further institutionalized by the Law of Georgia on General Education in 2007. The ensuing development was the formation of the Teacher Professional Development Center in 2007-2009, which developed standards for teachers (Chakhaia et al., 2017). The standards were to be used as a guidepost for teachers' knowledge and skills. The standards developed by the Teacher Professional Development center laid the foundation for the subsequent teacher certification scheme.

In Post-Soviet Georgia, the law on teacher certification exams was created in 2005. The aim of the proposed plan was to have teachers prove their qualifications by passing exams in the subject area and professional skills. The results and the effects of the certifications exams were inconclusive and largely negligible. Teachers' opinions on the importance and the need of certification varied widely. Thirty percents of them regarded certifications as unnecessary (ISSA, 2012). Opinions on the usefulness of the certification in terms of professional skills and pedagogy also attracted divergent views: some teachers believed that they gained knowledge about content and pedagogy in the preparation process, while others held negative beliefs on the efficiency and practicality of the proposed scheme (Kobakhidze, 2013).

Regarding specific professional development for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher in Georgia, there has been a scarcity of substantial teacher-development programs (Polat, 2009). Teacher education for EFL teachers, within the scope of professional development, often consists of short-term training sessions. These training sessions have been geared to prepare teachers for the certification exams and introduction of new books.

For instance, Georgian Ministry of Education mandated textbooks for primary level English learners published by McMillan English Language Publishing. McMillan in partnership with the government supported extensive training programs for teachers across the country. Even though these trainings helped teachers to better introduce the new material to students, on a larger scheme, trainings were nothing but a miniscule attempt to alleviate the quality of the Georgian teachers of English. These training sessions, initiated by the government under the scheme of the professional development, have rarely focused on enriching the teachers' content knowledge in writing pedagogy.

The study reported here sought to understand how English language writing is currently being implemented in schools in the country of Georgia. An additional objective of the study was to gather teachers' perceptions of their pre-service and in-service education. Understanding this information is very important considering the changes that Georgia underwent in terms of educational reforms after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Learning about teachers' perceptions of their pre-service education will shed light on the situation that existed in higher education in Georgia prior to its independence. This study highlights the current educational climate. It also helps us understand where these teachers stand in terms of their educational level, how teachers see themselves in the current educational system, and how higher education impacted their instructional abilities, specifically in composition.

Lastly, for teachers to gain new skills and adjust to the demands of the reforms and innovation, it is necessary to be able to participate in professional development sessions. By learning about EFL teachers' perceptions of the professional development opportunities, we gained a view of the programs that are available for teachers in Georgia and how the teachers and their students have been impacted by these programs. Specifically, the study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do EFL teachers perceive their pre-service education?
2. How is English writing implemented in Georgian schools?
3. What are the perceptions of teachers of professional opportunities regarding writing?

## Methods

The goal of the qualitative research design was to explore teachers' perceptions of the influence of the pre-service preparation and professional development on their teaching practices as well as their understanding of the writing curriculum as it is enacted in Georgian schools. An exploratory approach, based on grounded theory methodology and principles, was employed to provide the researcher with the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the teachers' perceptions (Creswell, 2011). We conducted individual semi-structured interviews with the teachers, allowing us to gain an in-depth understanding of classroom teachers' perceptions of the influence of pre-service preparation and professional development on their teaching practices and understanding of implementation of writing curriculum. The semi-structured interview format afforded us the opportunity to probe more deeply into participants' responses and to ask the follow up questions leading to richer, more robust data.

### Participants

We used a purposeful sampling, namely maximal variation sampling strategy to select EFL teachers working in Georgian schools. The rationale for using this method is to "present multiple perspectives of individuals" to document unique and diverse variations (Creswell, 2011, p. 207). The researchers sampled individuals that differed on the following characteristics: age, employment (private vs public schools), educational level (bachelors' vs. masters'), and years of experience teaching English, the region of employment as well as ethnicity. The final 12 participants included teachers from four regions in Georgia: Kartli, Samegrelo, Sametskhe-Javaskheti, and Svaneti. Four teachers worked in private schools and the remaining eight teachers were employed in public schools. Regarding their experience and educational level, five teachers had less than ten years of experience working as EFL teachers and the other six teachers had more than ten years of experience working in various educational settings as English teachers and lecturers. Seven teachers held Master's level diplomas from Georgian universities, three teachers had Bachelor's degrees, and two teachers had Bachelor's degrees in different fields with Master's

degrees in English. The workload of the participants ranged from five to thirty-three hours per week. All twelve teachers were females.

### Data Collection and Analysis

Data of the study were from in-depth individual interviews with the twelve EFL teachers. The audio-taped interviews were conducted in Georgian language through Skype and lasted for about an hour for each teacher. Prior to the interview, the researcher contacted teachers through an email and maintained the contact with them to find a time for online interviews. The researcher also sent the consent forms to potential participants. Even though 17 teachers were contacted for participation, 12 teachers eventually expressed their willingness to take part in the study.

To increase the validity of the study, procedures that decrease the biases and questions of objectivity often associated with the qualitative research were employed. Creswell (2011) recommends using several methods for verification purposes such as member checking, peer debriefing, disconfirming evidence. In this study, researchers used member checking, peer debriefing and disconfirming evidence to limit the biases associated with the qualitative study. For example, authors incorporated member checking to add validity to the research findings. Furthermore, participants of the study received the transcripts for verification purposes and commented on the themes and categories by confirming the accuracy of the overall account. Another validity procedure that researchers employed was peer debriefing. A colleague who is familiar with the topic, reviewed the analysis and data selection method before a final version of the paper was written. And last, trustworthiness of the research findings is extremely important and it was achieved by disconfirming the evidence. Disconfirming the evidence involves a deliberate and articulate search for disconfirmation and helps to combat the investigator's natural tendency to seek confirmation of her or his preliminary or emerging findings (Murrow, p. 256). In the study, the researchers identified the potential disconfirming data and compared with confirming instances.

## Results

### EFL Teacher at Pre-service Education

Nine teachers, seven of whom worked in public and two in private schools, expressed their concerns that the teacher preparation at a preservice level had not prepared them to become effective teachers of writing. They thought that the pedagogic and content-knowledge they gained were not sufficient to be knowledgeable about composition pedagogy. Specifically, there was a strong awareness on the part of the teachers about the “gap” in the pedagogic knowledge and they regarded it as a direct consequence of the limited curriculum the universities they attended had offered. One of the teachers offered the following explanation:

*“Upon graduation from my first college, I felt confident about my knowledge in English language. It was only at Master’s level, when it dawned on me that my knowledge of the language was minimal. I started doubting myself, my capacities...I was asking myself: ‘why did I think I was ready?’ I was not ready for Master’s level studies...It was frustrating but then I talked with others and looked like we all were more or less in the same shoes...we just had to work hard and catch up with the requirements.”*

In this particular response, the respondent is alluding to the fact that Georgian institutions of higher learning were mostly unable to provide high quality education to their students. According to the teachers’ accounts, modern teaching methodologies and curricula were largely absent in universities. The gap was mostly vivid for those teachers who had an opportunity to attend international universities or had a chance to study abroad. The respondent who provided the insight in the above passage attended one of the prestigious private international university in Georgia. Such institutions of higher learning were distinguished with very high tuition costs but in return they offered higher standards of teaching and learning.

Strong disillusionment often came from teachers who attended universities during the 1990s. One teacher was pointed in her response:

*“I have used nothing from the university I was attending to for my Bachelor’s degree.... Nothing...it was a workbook system...Russian System. Write a homework! Submit the homework!”*

Teachers also observed the absence of an academic writing curriculum at pre-service level. Even though they studied as language majors, they did not have classes that would prepare them for composition instruction. One teacher poignantly recollected on what she was taught at the pre-service level in terms of composition.

*“We never studied composition as such as far as I remember. Of course, we were writing grammar based assignments, we were asked to do translations, and occasionally were asked to write an essay. But throughout all five years of my education, I probably wrote the maximum of ten essays. Not more definitely. When I started attending training on teaching composition, I understood we did not study writing as such. Then, I asked few of my friends who attended different universities and they expressed the similar concerns. (It)looks like they did not have composition classes separately either.”*

The sense of regret and sadness permeated the words of teachers when they reflected on their university preparation. For example, one teacher who attended one of the public universities in Georgia, remarked:

*“I have not studied writing pedagogy at the university. I have not received an appropriate education. That’s why I sometimes say I am unhappy about it...I am a student of the areuloba (term in Georgian language to describe the turbulent times of the 1990s).”*

From the quotes of these teachers we can see that they not only understood their own deficiency in writing pedagogy but also were attributing their lack of knowledge in writing pedagogy to the inadequate university preparation, which they, in turn, linked with the social and economic challenges of the country of the time.

### Teaching Writing in Schools

Teacher interviews revealed that an emphasis on teaching writing was never a main priority of schools. In other words, the majority of the teachers observed that schools largely neglected teaching writing because it was not part of the requirements of the national entrance exams prior to 2005. They also reported that the writing component was added to the National Unified Examinations in English in 2006 but despite the requirement writing is still largely ignored in schools and considerably less time is allocated to teaching this

skill in school curricula. The following quotation from a teacher exemplifies this theme:

*"I always try to engage my students in writing practices. I give them small essays on familiar topics. Unfortunately, our English textbooks do not provide much opportunities for engaging students in writing activities. Sometimes, when I assign an essay, students seem startled. They ask me: Ms. Lia (pseudonym), why do you assign us an essay? Is it in our textbooks?"*

There was a unanimous agreement among teachers that Georgian students' composition skills in L2 language are below the sufficient level and they are often reluctant to write an essay. The assertion of this teacher is a succinct description of students' writing competencies shared by the study participant:

*"Our students often lack the minimal competencies in writing. The situation is so dire that students get anxious about writing an essay. Our Unified Entrance Exams reflect this problem: Students have lower scores in an essay component of the English exam. Writing is a real "Achilles's Heel" for students."*

It is interesting to note that poor writing competency in the L2 context was perceived as a consequence of the lack of experiences writing in L1 language. Study participants admitted that their students often did not have much exposure to writing tasks in their native Georgian language. A teacher from a private school provided the following perspective:

*"I think that writing experiences in Georgian language influence the writing skill in English language. I had few students who complained to me: "How should I write in English when I hardly write in the Georgian language?!"*

Another obstacle that had been identified by teachers is concerned with the school level policies that do not mandate implementation of regular writing skills in the classrooms. Absence of a unified curriculum creates a barrier between teachers and schools to enact a writing curriculum. The absence of institutional support systems and policies do not provide incentives for a teacher to implement regular writing assignments. One teacher noted:

*"School tests in English do not require a student to write an essay. Students are asked to write an essay only at the Univers-*

*ty Entrance exams. I can say that at school level, writing is completely ignored."*

The majority of the study's participants identified the consequences of the barriers that blocked the implementation of the writing curricula in classrooms. They pointed out that many parents send their children to private tutors because they are afraid schools are failing to prepare the students for university examinations. As one teacher questioned:

*"How are we supposed to teach writing in these circumstances to students? The only option that is left for parents of these kids is to send their kids to the private teachers. They may get some help there."*

When teachers were asked about the approaches to teaching writing, many of them unanimously reported that they are enacting some elements of the process-based approaches to teaching. Even though no theory or approach was identified, they mentioned employing brainstorming, planning and modeling. The teacher behind this quotation aptly showed the current state of affair in writing instruction:

*"Prior to assigning an essay, I devote instruction time to brainstorming. I help them generate ideas...Also, I provide a model essay. They know that the essay should have an introduction, thesis, body and a conclusion. I encourage them to write at least short sentences."*

As this response suggests teachers were aware of some elements of the process based pedagogy but the knowledge seemed disjoint and incoherent. According to teachers' reports, on modeling, they not only raised awareness of essay structures but they also revealed that instructional approaches to writing were rather limited. The main focus on text structures and cognitive aspects of process pedagogies were minimally applied.

### **Teachers' Thoughts on Professional Development**

Teachers unanimously attributed their professional growth in writing instruction to the professional development opportunities. By identifying the professional development programs teachers were referring to the training program provided by the government and by other non-government organizations to teachers. The aim of the training provided by the government was to acquaint teachers with a certification exam format. The writing was one of the components of the training. Regarding workshops and trainings by non-

governmental organizations, it mainly included trainings offered by the English Teachers' Association of Georgia (ETAG). The ETAG operates in Georgia since 1995 and has nine branches throughout the country. The organization offers trainings to its members in various domains of teaching English. Even though these trainings were neither long term or systematic, teachers believed that without them they would not be able to enrich their instructional methods and acquaint themselves with current teaching practices in writing. The response from one of the participants aptly shows the disposition of other teachers toward professional development and trainings offered in their field:

*"I can boldly say that what we know about writing is mostly thanks to the trainings we attended. If not for these trainings, we would not be aware of common best practices in writing instruction."*

Despite the overall positive attitude to the professional development, respondents poignantly admitted that the professional development opportunities were not offered on a regular basis. They mentioned that government sponsored professional workshops are quite rare. Many teachers acknowledged that instead of government mandated training, they attend private training provided by such organizations as the British Council, non-governmental organizations, associations and learning centers. One teacher explained:

*"I always try to attend trainings offered by the ETAG (She refers to the English Teachers Association of Georgia). Their writing trainings were very beneficial for me. If not these trainings, I would not know anything about teaching writing today."*

Teachers also attributed their learning and professional growth to the widespread growth of the Internet and social media. One teacher noted:

*"I am often reading news on the Internet. Sometimes I read books online in English. I would say I try to read everything that interests in me in English. And, I listen and watch too. It is one way to help myself improve my overall proficiency in a foreign language."*

As seen from this reflection, the exposure to free online resources holds a huge appeal for teachers. Embracing the Internet as a learning tool is a great way to improve language proficiency for these teachers; they are able to read texts of various difficulties online and listen to English speaking radio or videos or a YouTube channel. However, it has to be noted that while existence of the worldwide web is appealing, teachers are aware that they need systemic training in methodology and theories of teaching English. They understand that professional growth is insurmountable without a proper theoretical basis. The study participants noted that teachers should be equipped with learning and teaching theories in order to adapt their knowledge to various contexts and student populations. This teacher poignantly reflected on the question about her self-development pathways:

*"Of course, I'm benefiting from the Internet but there are serious matters of theory, methodology and pedagogy I will not be able to access from the web. What should I do?! How should I look for the sources when I do not know what to look for?"*

Despite their attempts to fill in the gap created by the lack of quality pre-service education and systematic in-service education, most teachers understood that their efforts only allowed them to scratch the surface. Many teachers revealed their gratitude for existing opportunities but they also admitted that their instructional knowledge in composition will not improve unless they have opportunities of professional growth in the field of writing.

## Discussion

Our study aimed to understand how English writing is enacted in Georgian schools, how EFL teachers perceive their pre-service education and perceptions of teachers on their professional development as it regards to writing. The qualitative data shows clearly that the teachers are dissatisfied with their pre-service education. The data also reveals that there is a mismatch between school curriculum and higher education institutions. The third section consists of the description of the

teachers' professional growth pathways. It reveals how Georgian EFL teachers embrace the challenges and seek independent and unique ways for self-development and professional progress.

### Inadequate Pre-service Preparation

We gleaned from teachers' responses that they were acutely aware of their own deficiencies in instructional and pedagogic knowledge in the composition field. The sharp awareness of the gaps in knowledge and pe-

dagogy was coming from teachers who studied at the institutions of higher learning in 1990s – the times when Georgia was experiencing challenging transition from Soviet system to a democratic state. It was a time when most institutions of higher learning were disrupted due to the political and economic turmoil. In such conditions, it was difficult to maintain high standards of teaching and learning. Therefore, teachers who went through the teacher preparation process during that time, lamented that they did not have an opportunity to adequately prepare for teaching the foreign language. These findings are aligned with the quality of education mentioned in previous studies (Gvaramidze, 2010). The quality of teaching was especially low at private universities that started to emerge after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Insufficient funds of privately held institutions, lax admission standards, and a drive to enroll large number of students further diminished the academic standards of private institutions. They often were notorious for inadequate academic preparation and for setting a low academic bar for their students (Gvaramidze). Given these conditions atop other structural, administrative and systematic problems, it was a challenge for many higher education institutions to offer high quality education.

Teachers are clearly alluding to the fact that the political turmoil Georgia underwent in the 1990s created a chain reaction of events: political and social unrest affected the education system and consequently participants of the system – the teachers. Indeed, to shed a light on this specific issue, it is necessary to take into consideration that the impact of Soviet Educational system lingered long even after the dissolution of the Soviet bloc. It was only after the Rose Revolution in 2003 that sweeping reforms in the educational sector eradicated corrupt practices that saturated and negatively impacted all aspects of the education system. In addition, the data from these interviews reflect the research conducted in other post-Soviet countries which illuminate the fact that teaching writing as communicative act was an activity mainly ignored in former USSR countries even after the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Tarnopolsky, 2000).

As it is apparent from the teachers' responses, English teachers' preparation at the pre-service level left them with a sense of dis-

satisfaction about their education. Prior to the Rose Revolution, corrupt practices were prevalent at all levels of the education system, from admission to the universities to teaching process. It was not uncommon to purchase degrees or credentials or misuse the available institutional funds (Rostiashvili, 2012). Of course, introducing new reforms have since been in full swing, and gradually the improvements are evident. However, improving the quality of education takes a considerable time, refinement and allocation of resources and funds.

### **Schools and Higher Education Institutions**

The study also investigated how English writing curriculum is enacted in Georgian schools. As teachers reported, prior to 2005, there was no regulation, policy or curricula that would mandate the development of students' writing skills in schools. Indeed, in the years preceding 2005, exams in foreign languages, including English, were comprised of oral exams and written translation of texts from Georgian to English and vice versa. After the introduction of the National Unified Examination in 2006, students are tested in three language skills: reading, listening, and writing. The writing component of the exam entails activities that demonstrate students' mastery of intermediate level grammar and an ability to write a short essay based on a prompt. Despite the existing requirement to pass the written part of the test, English writing at a school level is mainly circumscribed to the requirements such as fill-in-the-gap activities and completing various grammar related activities. The reports of the teachers parallel the findings of Polat's (2009) study which found that foreign language curriculum in school contexts is largely dominated by grammar exercises. Since no official methodology or curricula exists that would require teachers to develop their students' written communicative skills, the opportunity to engage students in such tasks is largely dependent on teachers' initiative and willingness.

We can glean from the teachers' responses that the absence of the requirement to test students' composition skills in English contributes to the lack of writing practices in schools. Given that there is not a requirement or an official demand to assess students' ability to perform communicative functions in a foreign language provides a picture which showcases that there is a mismatch between schools and universities. In other words,

schools should be the platforms for students to prepare for college entrance exams. The mismatch we see between schools and higher education institutions suggests that schools on a large part, are not able to prepare students for university exams. The failure of school systems to provide tools for both teachers and students contributes to the further empowering shadow education. Shadow education, which is a widely used term that describes various forms of private tutoring, was an unofficial strand of the education system in the Soviet times. The data from the interviews clearly reflect the current educational picture; despite the reforms in education sector, shadow education still flourishes in Georgia (Matiasvili & Kutateladze, 2006). After the Rose Revolution in 2003, the major reforms in education sector eradicated corrupt practices, especially at higher education level. The new Unified Entrance Exams afforded an opportunity to students to secure places in the university based on their test results. Today, corrupt practices at HE level are almost non-existent but the need to send students to private teachers still prevails. This is mostly due to several reasons: (1) disjunction between university and school curriculum, and (2) Inability of schools to prepare students for school university level exams. The existence of such conditions creates the need for private tutors and private classes. In the context of writing English, the need to send students to private teachers stems from the void that exists between school and university system.

Another finding that emerged from the teachers' responses is that the lack of experiences in the students' mother language can significantly hinder the development of writing skills of L2 learners. This finding is in line with other studies which indicate that writing in L1 can have a tremendous impact on L2 writing competency (Carson & Kuehn, 1992; Crossley et al., 2011). Teachers expressed their concern that most students struggle to write short essays even if they have enough vocabulary and the adequate command of grammar. Indeed, if new writers have strong writing skills in their native language, it will be comparatively easy to build on and develop further their L2 writing competency. However, it does not mean that L1

composition skills and knowledge are directly transferable to L2 contexts. For example, Ortega (2009) acknowledged the impact L1 can have on L2 development but he warned that such an impact does not necessarily presuppose "accelerating or delaying" students writing competencies (p. 53). Considering these divergent views on the influence of L1 on L2 language competence, it would be misguided to make any decisive conclusion on the effects of the L1 writing practices on the L2 writing progress. However, it can be argued that the exposure of writing tasks in one's native language would definitely give more experience and leverage to language learners, and would also create more favorable conditions for EFL teachers teaching composition.

### **Professional Growth and Learning Pathways**

There is much evidence in our study to suggest that teachers, despite the lack of the professional development opportunities, began to shape their own trajectories of learning. They attended training and workshops offered by non-governmental organizations. Some of the teachers responded to the deficit to the pre-service preparation by enrolling in professional organizations and by sharing their experiences with their colleagues. It has to be noted that external sources and opportunities of professional development are indeed appealing considering that government cannot provide such opportunities regularly. However, the problem is that not all teachers can afford paying for training and transportation fees to attend a professional development program. Some teachers, especially in rural areas, may not always have information available as to where and when such training is held.

Many teachers acknowledged that the main source of self-education is the internet. access to online educational websites has been a new and cost-free enterprise for Georgian teachers. Indeed, the use of Internet as a learning tool, according to the research has long been proven as an effective method. However, the use of Internet as a way of personal self-development as an educator is a topic that needs further exploration and investigation.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, the present study aimed to understand how English writing is taught in

post-Soviet Georgia and how EFL teachers perceive their preservice and in-service edu-



cation as it pertains to writing. The analysis of the results suggests that implementation of writing curricula is hampered by a number of contextual variables such as an absence of the writing methodology and school curricula. The findings of our study also indicate that the teachers' lack of knowledge in composition pedagogy stems from the inadequate teacher preparation and lack of in-service teacher preparation. Yet, it has to be noted that such a diminished state of written pedagogy is not only specific to the Georgian context. The EFL teachers in general in many countries are not adequately prepared for teaching writing (Casanave, 2009; Lee, 2010; Reichelt, 2009). To change the dynamics of writing instruction in schools, composition should be used as a vehicle for teaching language structure and vocabulary. However, unless dramatic changes are made in school curricula and general language teaching policies, such changes in teaching will not take place. In addition, the findings of this study are in line with other research which indicate that there are not adequate professional development opportunities for EFL teachers in Georgia. For example, the findings of the study conducted by Polat (2009) point to the lack of the suitable development opportunities for language teachers of Georgia. This indicates the need for systematic programs for teachers to engage in separate courses where sole attention is devoted to the composition studies. More theory oriented PDs are necessary for teachers to reduce their pedagogic and instructional knowledge gap in composition.

The findings revealed that teachers are stymied on ways to implement a writing curriculum in their classrooms due to the absence of the official writing curriculum in schools. Assigning writing assignments to the students

is very sporadic and depends solely on the willingness and enthusiasm of individual teachers. To improve the existing situation, reforms should be implemented at all levels of the education system: pre-service, in-service and school level policies. To ameliorate the gap in teachers' pedagogic knowledge in composition, introduction of more rigorous composition curriculum at the preservice level together with ongoing systematic professional development opportunities are needed. Equipping teachers with foundational knowledge about writing pedagogies would certainly give more leverage to teachers to expand on their instructional practices and modify and adapt them to their local contexts. As Ferris and Hedgcock (2014) note the "Knowledge of formal models, theories, and methods enable teachers to discover, build, and articulate their own theories" (p. 3). The absence of such language expertise deprives teachers of the opportunity to draw on their pedagogic knowledge base. Such changes will better support teachers in meeting their pedagogic needs and will help students improve writing skills.

Since the data of the present study came from the qualitative interviews with EFL teachers in Georgia, it will be important in future studies to gather data from other post-Soviet countries. Researching other foreign language contexts in relations with writing instruction will shed a better light on the impact the political unrest of the 1990s had on the education system and especially on the EFL teachers. Participants' perceptions of professional development and their in-service and pre-service education will also be important when evaluating the needs of teachers and designing programs that will help teachers to raise the standards of teaching writing in a foreign language.

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